

March 21, 2014

Dear Parker School Community,

The New Bedford Educators Association and the educators at the Parker School have closely reviewed the Commissioner's "Preliminary Plan" for improving student achievement at the Parker School. Attached are substantive comments and recommended modifications to the Preliminary Plan that we are submitting to the stakeholder group for consideration at its meeting on March 24.

Parker School educators agree that the status quo is not good enough; they have been saying so for years. And they embrace efforts to help "maximize the rapid academic achievement" of their students. Unfortunately, this Preliminary Plan takes a top-down approach to the turnaround of the school. The lack of teacher involvement in the development of the turnaround plan has resulted in a Preliminary Plan that is based on some fundamental misunderstandings of the current educational curriculum and supports at the school (or lack thereof) and falls short in many areas where more concrete (and sometimes more ambitious) steps are warranted. Cutting out the educators in the school—the very teachers who have been dedicated to teaching and improving the lives of the students there—from being part of designing its future has had a tremendous demoralizing effect.

It must also be recognized that working conditions are teaching conditions. Therefore, some of the changes to working conditions in the Preliminary Plan are particularly alarming. Teachers may be expected to work 291 hours more per school year (around 36 days) than they did under the Level4 plan. Yet, the Preliminary Plan does not provide for *any* additional compensation. Additionally, the Preliminary Plan includes a "pay-for-performance" mechanism that many educators object to as divisive, and that the preponderance of research indicates does not improve student success.

As a result of these issues with the Preliminary Plan, our informal poll of 20 of the educators at Parker indicates that 17 do not want to continue working there next year under the plan as-is, and a few more are undecided. But the problem lies not only with staffing for next year. Having teaching conditions so divergent from the rest of the district (and surrounding communities) and an educational culture that does not include substantial teacher collaboration will likely lead to a high rate of teacher turnover, which has been shown to negatively impact student achievement, especially in low-performing schools.

The Parker educators care too much about their students to simply leave at the end of the year without letting the community know their views on how to provide the best possible education for Parker students in a caring, collaborative school community. Accordingly, many have invested a lot of time in reviewing the Preliminary Plan and providing feedback to the NBEA. We realize that there is a lot of information in the attached document and we encourage the stakeholder group to schedule additional meetings as needed to fully study and discuss the Preliminary Plan and our proposed modifications.

We hope other members of the group agree with our analysis and adopt our suggestions as part of the group's recommended modifications to the Commissioner. We also look forward to considering suggested modifications from other members of the group.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,

Signed by Lou St. John

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Signed by Marcia Guy

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**Recommendations of the New Bedford Educators Association for
Modifications to the John Avery Parker Elementary School Turnaround Plan
March 21, 2014**

On March 7, 2014, the Commissioner of Education issued a preliminary turnaround plan ("Preliminary Plan") for the Parker School. Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 69, § 1J(p) provides that within 30 days of receiving the Preliminary Plan, the local stakeholder group, the superintendent, and the school committee may propose modifications to the Preliminary Plan. Accordingly, proposed modifications must be submitted by April 6, 2014. The New Bedford Educators Association (NBEA) and the teachers in the Parker School have examined the Preliminary Plan to determine whether its terms are consistent with the goal of maximizing rapid academic achievement of students in a culture of shared success among students, faculty and staff as well as whether the terms are lawful under existing laws. As active participants in the stakeholder group and as the representatives of the teachers at the Parker School, it is our hope that the stakeholder group will present a unified set of recommendations to the Commissioner after careful consideration and discussion of the recommendations made herein.

Throughout Chapter 69, the Legislature states that the overarching goal of turnaround plans for underperforming and chronically underperforming schools is to "maximize the rapid academic achievement of students." *See e.g.*, G.L. c. 69, § 1J(m) and (n). The Legislature knew that in order to improve student achievement, the plan must promote "a culture of student support and success among school faculty and staff." G.L. c. 69, § 1J(n)(12). Naturally, the culture of student success does not occur in a vacuum; faculty and staff must be a part of and share in that success, too. Parker School teachers and the NBEA embrace support efforts in the Preliminary Plan that are reasonably calculated to lead to rapid academic achievement of their students and there are certainly valuable premises within it. However, the teachers and the NBEA also have found proposals in the Preliminary Plan that they do not believe, based on their professional judgment and experience in the school, will lead to such academic achievement. Moreover, there are drastic changes to the working conditions of teachers that are not only unnecessary but, since working conditions are teaching conditions, have the potential to be detrimental to the goal of rapid academic achievement.

The following are the NBEA's recommendations regarding modifications of the plan to the stakeholders, the superintendent and the school committee that will increase the chances of the turnaround plan fulfilling its statutory goals.

A. Educational Practice and Policy Issues

The faculty members at the Parker School have completed a thorough review of the draft Turnaround Plan; their comments and recommendations for modifications to the Plan are described below. Collectively, they have many years of experience in educating K-5 students. Their direct knowledge of the Parker School offers a perspective that should be highly valued in

the development of a plan that will be successful in advancing the academic achievement of Parker students.

1. Priority 1: Maximize and accelerate student achievement by increasing the rigor of classroom instruction.

The Parker faculty agrees that a strong, aligned curriculum in all subject areas is the foundation for improved student learning. The Reading Street program is a significant improvement and should be implemented in Grades K-5. The curriculum proposals in other subject areas need modification. In addition, professional development has been inconsistent in both its quality and purpose. The Parker faculty believes that high-quality professional development focused on identified needs is a key element of ensuring effective instruction for Parker students.

Recommendations for Priority 1:

Curriculum

- a. The Reading Street program's writing component should be used rather than the suggested Empowering Writers program. Teachers do not believe that this writing program meets the needs of their students.
- b. The Lively Letters program is used in the Pre-K program only; it is not an appropriate program for Kindergarten students.
- c. The district should solicit input from teachers in the selection of the new math curriculum. Despite the absence of a coherent curriculum, Parker students have showed steady improvement in math scores over the past four years. The faculty has a solid understanding of what is needed to sustain and accelerate that improvement; their knowledge should be incorporated into the selection of a new curriculum.
- d. The Parker School does not have a comprehensive science curriculum. The curriculum map and science kits do not constitute an adequate program; no professional development has been available, supporting materials for the science kits are not available and there is inadequate vertical articulation of the science curriculum. A science curriculum should be identified with teacher input and implemented with necessary professional development and materials.

Professional Development

- a. The Plan should include a systematic approach for teacher input in identifying professional development needs as well as providing feedback on the quality of professional development provided. A top-down approach to professional development is unlikely to be effective.
- b. The professional development program should be part of the school structure, focusing on specific needs of Parker School faculty. Using an "external consultant" to identify professional development areas will not lead to internal capacity to sustain an effective professional development program over time.

- c. The literacy coach and teacher leader roles are inadequately defined; there is no description of qualifications, schedule or assignments. It appears that the teacher leaders are expected to continue the same teaching responsibilities and add on the teacher leader roles. Teacher leaders and coaches need to be experienced and respected members of the Parker faculty who have reduced teaching assignments. The purpose and responsibilities of these positions must be specified.

Pre-Kindergarten Program

The Parker Schools needs a comprehensive Pre-Kindergarten program that Parker School students will attend. The most effective way to advance the achievement of students is to ensure they come to school ready to learn. Currently many Parker Students come to Kindergarten already substantially behind. The Pre-K proposal in the draft Plan does not address the needs of Parker School students; it needs to be much more ambitious, including a coordinated outreach to enroll all children in the Parker School district. The Pre-Kindergarten program should be aligned and integrated with the curriculum and instruction of the K-% programs.

2. Priority 2: Establish school structures and systems to ensure that all students have teachers who are proficient in delivering rigorous instruction and maximize instructional time.

The Parker School faculty is concerned about the lack of a clear teaching schedule in the plan. It is difficult to envision how all elements of the plan can be incorporated in a meaningful way within the school day, especially time for collaboration on curriculum and instruction issues as well as professional development. This lack of a clear and feasible schedule is discouraging Parker educators from staying at the school next year and there is grave concern about the negative impact of a mass exodus of teachers on the students' future progress.

Recommendations for Priority 2:

- a. The Plan assumes the same schedule is appropriate for all grade levels- core instruction in the morning, then an intervention block and finally related arts at the end of the day. Students in grades K-2 may well benefit from consolidated core instruction at the beginning of the day; however, a different approach may be more appropriate for grades 3-5. The Parker faculty has many ideas about how to adjust the schedule to avoid unnecessary interruptions and provide students with a consistent routine. The schedule should be developed with their input.
- b. The current staffing is inadequate to implement small intervention groups; intervention services are currently being provided by staff members who do not have experience and have not received any professional development in intervention strategies. The plan does not indicate that there will be any increase in staff. The final plan should ensure a sufficient increase in staffing.
- c. Providing special education services using a pull-out model causes substantial disruption to classroom instruction for these students. A co-teaching inclusion model should be implemented for special education students.

3. Priority 3: Provide students with appropriate supports and acceleration opportunities to maximize their learning by using data to differentiate instruction and identify opportunities for intervention and enrichment.

Approximately 50% of the current Parker School staff has had previous training in data analysis and use. The staff finds that currently the use of data is not consistent or properly focused. Data analysis capacity must be developed within the school structure; relying on an external partner can work against developing this capacity.

The Plan relies on the Teacher Collaboration Teams (TCT) to build data analysis capacity. The TCT model has significant scheduling issues and meetings lack focus. The topics appropriate for discussion in TCT meetings need to be specified; for example, individual educator evaluation issues should not be part of TCT conversation.

Recommendations for Priority 3:

- a. Provide professional development in data analysis and use so that the capacity is built in-house and reliance on external consultants is unnecessary.
- b. Ensure that the school day includes time and a structure for data analysis. If the current TCT model is to continue to be used, there must be commitment to making sure the meetings are focused, efficient and scheduled at a time when all can attend.

4. Priority 4: Establish a climate that focuses on learning and engaging families as partners in student learning.

The school must address the chronic behavior issues of a small group of students whose behavior is dangerous and who are having a substantial impact on the school and classroom environment. A number of teachers have been assaulted by students; there is no consistent protocol on how dangerous student behavior is addressed. As a result, the needs of these students, which are substantial, are not being met and the rest of the school is being affected.

Recommendations for Priority 4:

- a. The Parker School needs to identify and implement a consistent behavior management system and protocols for handling student behavior issues.
- b. This must be made collaboratively to ensure that school and student needs are met and that all staff members have ownership of the program.

The Plan does not address the following issues identified by the Parker School faculty:

1. Leadership

The establishment of an atmosphere of trust among all members of the school community is a fundamental requirement for a successful school improvement initiative. To

this end, the Turnaround Plan should include collaborative structures for identifying problems and working on solutions. The Turnaround Plan includes the addition of a number of staff positions- turnaround manger, behavior intervention specialist, family resource center coordinator- and three external consultants to work on professional development, data systems and the Saturday Academy program. The Plan does not describe how these staff positions will be integrated into the leadership structure of the school or how meaningful professional collaboration with teachers will occur

2. Wraparound services

Parker School has a high poverty student population. In 2013-14, 88% of the students are low income; 84% are eligible for free lunch. These figures are the highest they have been in 10 years. While the Turnaround Plan mentions partnering with community agencies/organizations to provide wraparound services, the priority and scope of this strategy needs to be expanded substantially. As such, it fails to meet the requirements of Chapter 69.

3. Special Education

The Parker School uses a special education pull out model. This approach results in disruption to students' participation in regular education classes. A co-teaching special education model should be staffed and implemented. Currently special education teachers are providing intervention services to students who are not special education students, resulting in increased caseloads; in addition, special education teachers have not had focused professional development in intervention strategies.

4. Early Learning Program

The most effective long term strategy for advancing the achievement of students at the Parker School is to focus on school readiness and early learning. The Pre-Kindergarten program is one component of this strategy. In addition, the Parker School must commit to smaller Kindergarten class sizes and additional staffing that support the needs of early learners at the school. Few students enroll in Kindergarten at Parker with sufficient readiness skills; the current class size of 26 with one .5 paraprofessional is not adequate to meet these students' needs.

5. Technology

The Parker School technology and infrastructure and hardware need a significant upgrade. Parker School students need and deserve access to technology in order to meet college and career ready goals.

B. Teaching Conditions Issues

1. Reduced Rate of Compensation

The proposal to dramatically increase the number of hours in the teachers' schedules without providing additional pay (and in fact they may be losing stipends otherwise provided for in their collective bargaining agreement) is contrary to the legislative intent that pay should be sufficient to attract and retain good teachers and

thus undermines the ability to "maximize the rapid achievement of students" and promote a "culture of success."

The Legislature recognized in the explicit language of Chapter 69 that adequate funding of turnaround plans, including robust teacher compensation, is essential to meet the goal of maximizing student achievement and promoting a culture of success. See Chapter 69, § 1J(o)(4) (the Commissioner may provide funds to increase teacher salaries and attract or retain highly qualified teachers or to reward teachers who work in successful chronically underperforming schools); § 1J(o)(2) (the Commissioner may reallocate or increase funds to the school from the district budget to support a turnaround plan); § 1J(n)(6) (the Commissioner shall include a financial plan for the school in the turnaround plan that includes any additional funds to be provided by the district, commonwealth, federal government or other sources).

In line with the legislative intent and recognition that compensation should reflect teachers' vital work under a turnaround plan and be sufficient to attract and retain good teachers. Under the Parker School's Level 4 Plan the teachers were paid according to the salary schedule in their collective bargaining agreement plus a \$7000 stipend to compensate for an extended school day (an additional 1 hour per day). In addition, under the Level 4 plan teachers received a contractual hourly rate for other hours they worked, such as extra days beyond the 185 instructional days and home visits. Under the Level 5 Preliminary Plan, the \$7000 stipend purportedly will be rolled into the new career ladder salary scale for Parker School teachers. However, no additional compensation is provided for in the Level 5 Preliminary Plan even though the teachers will be expected to greatly increase the number of hours they must work over what they worked under the Level 4 plan.

For example, 40 additional minutes are added in the Preliminary Plan above what was in the Level 4 plan. Preliminary Plan, p. 15. In addition, the Preliminary Plan requires 4 evening parent conferences, 1 evening open house, and attendance at up to 4 school events, each for up to 2 hours, whereas the Level 4 plan (per the collective bargaining agreement) only required 2 such events. Preliminary Plan, p. 35. Additionally, the Preliminary Plan requires up to 3 monthly afterschool meetings for up to 75 minutes each and up to 2 Saturday Academies, the length of which is unclear but anticipated to be around 6.5 hours each. Preliminary Plan, p. 34. Also, the Preliminary Plan states that teachers will be selected to work a 4-week Summer Academy, 6.5 hours per day. Preliminary Plan, p. 33. This amounts to about *291 additional hours* required over the Level 4 plan schedule¹. Stated another way, Parker School teachers

¹ 1 Level 5 Preliminary Plan potential hours over Level 4 plan requirements- extended day: 185 days x 40 minutes= 7400 minutes or approximately 123 hours; Summer Academy: 16 days x 6.5 hours= 104 hours; Saturday Academies: 2 days x 6.5 hours= 13 hours; afterschool meetings: 3/month x 10 months x 1.25 hours=37.5 hours; evening conferences, etc.: 7 events x 2 hours= 14 hours
Total: 123 + 104 + 13 + 37.5 + 14 = 291.5 hours. (The number of required hours over district elementary schools not on turnaround plans is even greater, around 476 hours.)

could be asked to the equivalent of 36 additional *work days (or or more than 7 work weeks)* with no additional compensation should this Preliminary Plan be adopted as is.²

Furthermore, the Preliminary Plan announces that "[t]eachers and other professional staff shall devote whatever time is required to achieve and maintain high quality education at the Parker School." Preliminary Plan, pp. 14, 33. The Association is concerned that this language may be more than exhortatory and that it could signal an intention to add an undetermined number of hours at will, again for no additional compensation.

By failing to provide any additional pay for this enlarged work schedule, the Preliminary Plan is seeking to get Parker teachers at a steep discount. This undervalues the important work to be done at Parker and will discourage experienced, highly qualified teachers from working at the school. Moreover, even if teachers are successfully recruited, the fact that they are working such longer hours for no additional compensation will be a disincentive for them to stay when they may be able to transfer to another school in the district or take their experience outside the district. Research has shown that "teacher turnover has a significant and negative effect on student achievement in both math and ELA. Moreover, teacher turnover is particularly harmful to students in schools with large populations of low-performing [] students."³ The Preliminary Plan's terms are, therefore, inconsistent with the explicit funding sections of Chapter 69 and antithetical to the goals of maximizing student performance and promoting a culture of success.

Moreover, consistent with the legislative intent that teacher compensation must sufficiently compensate the important work of a turnaround plan, Chapter 69, §1J(o)(7) warns that the Commissioner "*shall not reduce the compensation of an administrator, teacher or staff member unless the hours of the person are proportionately reduced.*" In other words, the Commissioner may not reduce a teacher's rate of pay. The Commissioner cannot circumvent this prohibition in §1J(o)(7) by simply increasing a teacher's hours without proportionately increasing her pay, as the Preliminary Plan proposes. It is settled that increasing hours without proportionately increasing pay, like reducing compensation without reducing hours, has the effect of diminishing a teacher's rate of compensation. *German v. Commonwealth*, 410 Mass. 445 (1991) (where a public counsel attorney was required to work 8 extra days for no pay under the state furlough, the Supreme Judicial Court found that this adjustment in her paid work schedule created a "new [reduced] rate of compensation.") Although the Preliminary Plan

² The relative loss of compensation is exacerbated by the fact that teachers at the Parker School will not **receive stipends or contractual hourly pay for certain responsibilities for which their colleagues receive additional compensation; for example, before-school duties, substitute pay, advisory or enrichment activities, and home visits.** Preliminary Plan, p. 35 (staff members are expected to perform additional duties that support the smooth operation of the school before, during, and after the school day, including substitute coverage of classes, coverage of afterschool activities, and so on).

³ Matthew Ronfeldt, Hamilton Lankford, Susanna Loeb & James Wyckoff, *How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement* 17 (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Research, Working Paper No. 17176, 2011) ("turnover has a harmful *effect* on student achievement, even after controlling for different indicators of teacher quality, especially in lower-performing schools.")

suggests that teachers will be placed on the new scale in a manner to ensure compensation initially consistent with what they received under the Level4 plan (i.e., the contractual salary scale plus \$7000 stipend), the greatly increased hours means their *rate* of compensation by necessity is reduced. Accordingly, the Preliminary Plan not only thwarts the goal of maximizing rapid student academic achievement by insufficiently funding for teachers' compensation, it is in violation of Chapter 69's explicit mandate that the Commissioner shall not reduce teachers' rates of pay.

Recommendation for Rate of Compensation

The Commissioner should direct the Association and the School Committee to negotiate fair compensation for specific additional time devoted to the Parker School and the Commissioner's final turnaround plan should adopt this compensation.

2. Pay-for-Performance Compensation System

Pay-for-performance compensation systems have not been established as effective in improving teacher performance or promoting student achievement.

The Preliminary Plan proposes to replace the Association salary schedule with a "performance-based" compensation system that will compensate teachers "based on individual effectiveness, professional growth, and student academic growth." Preliminary Plan, p. 36. There is mixed support at best for the claim that such a system will "maximize the rapid academic achievement of students." On the contrary, in a series of recent controlled experiments using randomized trials with treatment and control groups in Tennessee, New York City, and Chicago, researchers consistently found that there is no evidence that "performance-based" teacher incentives increase student performance.

In a study conducted in Nashville schools, the authors found that \$5,000, \$10,000 and \$15,000 incentives based on student test scores for individual teachers in middle schools did not confirm the hypothesis that incentives would work as students of teachers randomly assigned to the treatment group did not outperform students whose teachers were assigned to the control group.⁴ A study examining a \$3000 incentive based in part upon student performance and growth metrics found that the incentive had no effect on student performance, attendance or graduation, or teacher behavior and, in fact, may have caused student achievement to decline, especially in larger schools.⁵ Using the same New York City study, another author also reported that the incentive program did not improve student

Fryer, R.G. (2011). *Teacher incentives and student achievement: Evidence from New York City public schools*. National Bureau of Economic Research.

⁴ Springer, M.G., Ballou, D., Hamilton, L., Le, V., Lockwood, J.R., McCaffrey, D.F., Petter, M. Y., and Stecher, B.M. (2010). *Final report: Experimental evidence from the Project on Incentives in Teaching*. National Center on Performance Incentives@ Vanderbilt.

⁵ Fryer, R.G. (2011). *Teacher incentives and student achievement: Evidence from New York City public schools*. National Bureau of Economic Research.

achievement in any grade level and had no effects on school progress report scores.⁶ Finally, a study of 20 Chicago schools⁷ concluded that annual teacher performance bonuses ranging from \$1,100 to \$15,000 produced no evidence that the program raised student test scores.

In addition to the lack of evidence that performance-based incentives improve student performance, there are concerns that such systems negatively affect teacher morale and motivation.⁸ This undermines a culture of success. Moreover, combined with the problems associated with the greatly increased hours without a commensurate increase in compensation, the negative impact on morale may make it very difficult to retain teachers at the Parker School. As stated above, teacher turnover can negatively impact student achievement.

Recommendation for Pay For Performance System

The final turnaround plan should not include a compensation system in 2014-2015 based upon student and teacher performance. The Association proposes that the parties jointly study all forms of salary schedule constructs to determine which will be most effective in attracting and retaining high quality teachers at the Parker School to maximize rapid academic achievement. In the meantime, the plan should compensate Parker teachers according to the Association salary scale plus an additional stipend and/or hourly rates (to be negotiated with the Association) for the increased devotion of time to the school and the plan.

3. Dispute Resolution Process

The lack of neutrality in the proposed dispute resolution process undermines a culture of success and confidence and inhibits rapid student achievement by undermining teacher confidence in the fairness of the plan and by creating a chilling effect on debate about the progress of the turnaround plan.

The Preliminary Plan posits that its "Dispute Resolution" procedure, among other working conditions, is "necessary" for the success of the turnaround plan. Preliminary Plan, pp. 31-32. It gives no reason for its assumption and the Association believes that the progress sought in the Preliminary Plan will be inhibited by the procedure. In part, this is due to the fact that the Commissioner, who establishes the turnaround plan and appoints the receiver (the Superintendent), is the final decision-maker. Preliminary Plan, p. 32. His self-interest in defending the turnaround plan and/or the position of the Superintendent (whom he appointed as receiver) seriously undermines his neutrality. Moreover, the procedure gives the decisions of the receiver "substantial deference." Thus, in addition to the procedure's obvious lack of impartiality, overwhelming and credible evidence on behalf of the teacher's position can be

⁶ Marsh, J.A., Springer, M.G., McCaffrey, D.F., Yuan, K., Epstein, S., Koppich, J., Kalra, Ni. DiMartino, C., and Peng, A. (2011). *The big apple/or educators: New York City's experiment with schoolwide performance bonuses*. RAND Corporation

⁷ Glazerman, S., and Seifullah, A., (2010). *An evaluation of the teacher advancement program in Chicago: Year two impact report*. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

⁸ See Springer, n.4, *supra*.

trumped by the required "deference" given to the receiver's less convincing evidence. This utterly offends the notion of a fair process as well as the statute's requirement to build a culture of success among students and school faculty. On the contrary, this procedure will strongly discourage the staff from having frank discussions with the Superintendent about how the turnaround plan is serving students and from proposing better alternatives.

Recommendation for Dispute Resolution Process:

The dispute resolution procedure should be replaced in the final turnaround plan with an accelerated arbitration process of the type approved by the Legislature in Chapter 69, § 11(o) governing the termination of professional status teachers. This would still ensure the prompt resolution of disputes yet give teachers the confidence to address plan and school issues without fear of retribution for which they would have no fair and neutral procedure for redress.⁹

⁹ Although in negotiations with the Commissioner regarding his proposed changes to working conditions the Association did agree to the dispute resolution process in the Preliminary Plan, the concerns expressed herein are still valid and bear consideration by the stakeholder group. The Association urges the stakeholder group to adopt the recommendation made herein to ensure a fair and impartial procedure for resolving disputes at the Parker School. It is the best way to ensure a free exchange of ideas and opinions regarding what is working and not working under the turnaround plan. That in turn best supports the goal of maximizing rapid academic achievement of students at the school.